

UMass Lowell
Survey of North Carolina Likely Voters

October 20-26, 2020

N=911 North Carolina Likely Voters

The sample has an adjusted margin of error +/-4.2%

See <http://uml.edu/polls> for full questionnaire/topline results and detailed methodology disclosure.

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Do you have a question about this poll? If so, tweet @UML_CPO and we'll get back to you.

HIGHLIGHTS

Trump and Biden still tied in tight North Carolina race

With less than a week to go, President Donald Trump and Former Vice President Joe Biden remain deadlocked in the contest for North Carolina's 15 Electoral Votes in a swing state poll of North Carolina likely voters released by the UMass Lowell Center for Public Opinion. North Carolina is a must-win state for the President, who trails his challenger in most national polls and must hold onto the narrow map of states that brought him a victory in 2016. The poll result, a tie, is virtually unchanged from a September 29th UMass Lowell poll that showed Trump and Biden even at 47%.

With minor party candidates included on the ballot, Trump now polls at 48%, Biden at 48%, other candidates at 2% and 2% of North Carolina likely voters say they are still undecided.

As turnout in North Carolina is now above 81% of the total turnout in the 2016 election,¹ it's become clear that early voting has become a major part of the story. Among those who have already voted, Biden has a sizeable lead over Trump, 62% to 36%. Among those who had not voted when the field was conducted, Trump leads 64% to 30%. A clear story of this election is that Biden's voters are voting and have voted and that the Trump campaign is counting on election day turnout to boost its numbers.

¹ <https://electproject.github.io/Early-Vote-2020G/index.html>



Biden is winning the support of 95% of Democratic voters in North Carolina, while Trump is winning the support of 89% of Republicans. The two candidates are splitting pure Independents relatively evenly, with a slight edge to Biden, who gets 43% support compared to Trump's 38%.

Biden's support is higher among respondents with a college degree, 51% to Trump's 44%, while Trump leads among those without a college degree 54% to 44%. However, Trump's biggest lead is among white voters without a college degree, where he leads Biden 66% to 31%.

White voters in North Carolina support Trump, 58% to 38%, while Black voters overwhelmingly support Biden, 83% to 14%. However, Trump here is doing better among Black voters than many might have expected. Young voters strongly back Biden, with those under 45 indicating they will vote for Biden at 57% compared to 37% for Trump, while those over 45 support Trump at 55% to 43% for Biden.

Many are curious about the impact of the Presidential debates in North Carolina. Our poll included 40% of interviews completed after the 2nd debate last Thursday and 60% completed before it, allowing us to compare if the race shifted while we were fielding the poll. There is, however, no difference between those interviewed before and after the 2nd Presidential debate. Trump and Biden are tied 48%-48% among both subgroups.

Asked who performed better in the debates, North Carolina likely voters overwhelmingly believe that Biden won the first debate 44% to Trump's 26% and a slim plurality believe that Trump won the second debate 44% to Biden's 38%.

But one thing that North Carolina likely voters do appear to agree on – the quality of the 2020 debates were much lower than in previous years. Asked if the debates this year were better, worse, or about the same as in previous years, an overwhelming 71% majority said they were worse than in previous years, 6% said better, and 14% said about the same.

Cunningham (D) slightly ahead of incumbent Tillis (R) by 4

In the race for U.S. Senate in North Carolina, incumbent Republican Senator Thom Tillis continues to trail Democratic challenger Cal Cunningham by 4 points in a contest that has moved within the poll's margin of error. The race is in the national spotlight as it is a possible flip for Democrats, who need to gain four seats to regain control of the chamber. Cunningham also made national news when he was embroiled in an apparent adultery scandal with a woman in California.

Cunningham previously lead Tillis by 6 points in a September 29, 2020 UMass Lowell poll. In today's release, Cunningham has the support of 49% of North Carolina likely voters supporting Cunningham, Tillis is at 45%, and 6% remain undecided. Cunningham's lead is bolstered by



support from a large percentage of Democratic voters (95%), leading among Independents, 41% to 35%, and also by gaining the support of 10% of Republican identifying cross-over voters.

Is Cunningham's affair hurting him in the race against Tillis? Asked whether his involvement in an extramarital affair made voters more or less likely to vote for Cunningham, or made no difference, 39% of voters said it made them less likely to vote for Cunningham, while 56% said it made no difference. Most notably, 12% of Democratic likely voters and 38% of pure independents reported that news of the affair made them less likely to vote for Cunningham.

Likewise, North Carolina likely voters were also asked if their Senators should vote for or against the nomination of Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court. A majority (55%) said that North Carolina's Senators (including Tillis) should vote for Barrett's confirmation.

The Pandemic Election

A central defining issue of the 2020 election campaign has been the coronavirus pandemic and resulting policy response from the government. With cases rates increasing around the country, including in North Carolina, it's important to understand how the virus is affecting the election.

Asked how satisfied they are with the federal government's response to COVID-19, 57% of North Carolina likely voters say they are unsatisfied, compared to 43% who are satisfied. Asked who is better suited to handle the pandemic, likely voters give the edge to Biden, 48% to 41% for Trump. On the question of whether it is safe to re-open schools, 54% of NC likely voters say that is either probably (30%) or definitely (24%) not safe to reopen North Carolina's local public schools for face-to-face instruction. Finally, when asked if Donald Trump could have avoided contracting COVID-19 by wearing a mask more often, 60% of likely voters say yes, while 39% say no.

What these questions show repeatedly is that when the election is framed through the lens of the pandemic, the President is consistently on the wrong side of public opinion. When the question is who will best handle the economy, Trump does well in North Carolina, 51% to Biden's 43%. It is on that issue that he could effectively find a way to break the tie in North Carolina. But, if this election is decided by a mounting body count and concerns about if and when life will ever go back to normal after the pandemic, President Trump is unlikely to find his way to reelection.

Other Findings from the poll

- In the race for Governor, incumbent Democratic Governor Roy Cooper leads his challenger, Republican Dan Forest by 12 points, 54% to 42%. The race is virtually unchanged from the end of September, when Cooper led forest by 13 points, 54% to 41%.
- On the generic ballot for the State House, Democrats and Republicans are polling nearly even, with Democrats at 49% and Republicans at 47%.
- Asked who they think will win the 2020 Presidential election, North Carolina likely voters give a Trump reelection the slight edge: 43% say Trump and 38% say Biden. There is some



evidence here that perception of this race has shifted as Trump was ahead 10 points on this question at the end of September.

- The Trump campaign has made a concerted effort to pin to Joe Biden the label of a “corrupt politician,” tying him to his son’s activities in the Ukraine. Has it worked? Head to head, our survey asked likely voters about the candidates on a number of dimensions. On the question of “who is more corrupt?” 47% say Trump and 42% say Biden, with 7% saying they are about equal, and 5% unsure.